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German armored assault artillery.
December 23, 1941.

ARMY WAR COLLEGE
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIVISION
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GERMAN ARMORED
ASSAULT ARTILLERY,

SOURCE

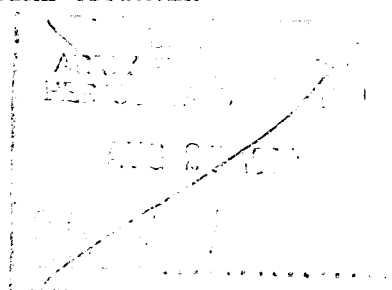
This bulletin is based upon the report of an American official observer in Berlin. The translated article, which deals with the employment of a battery of armored assault artillery of the "Greater Germany" Infantry Regiment on the French-Luxemburg border, originally appeared in Die Woche, a German weekly magazine.

Intended propagandistic effects should not be overlooked.

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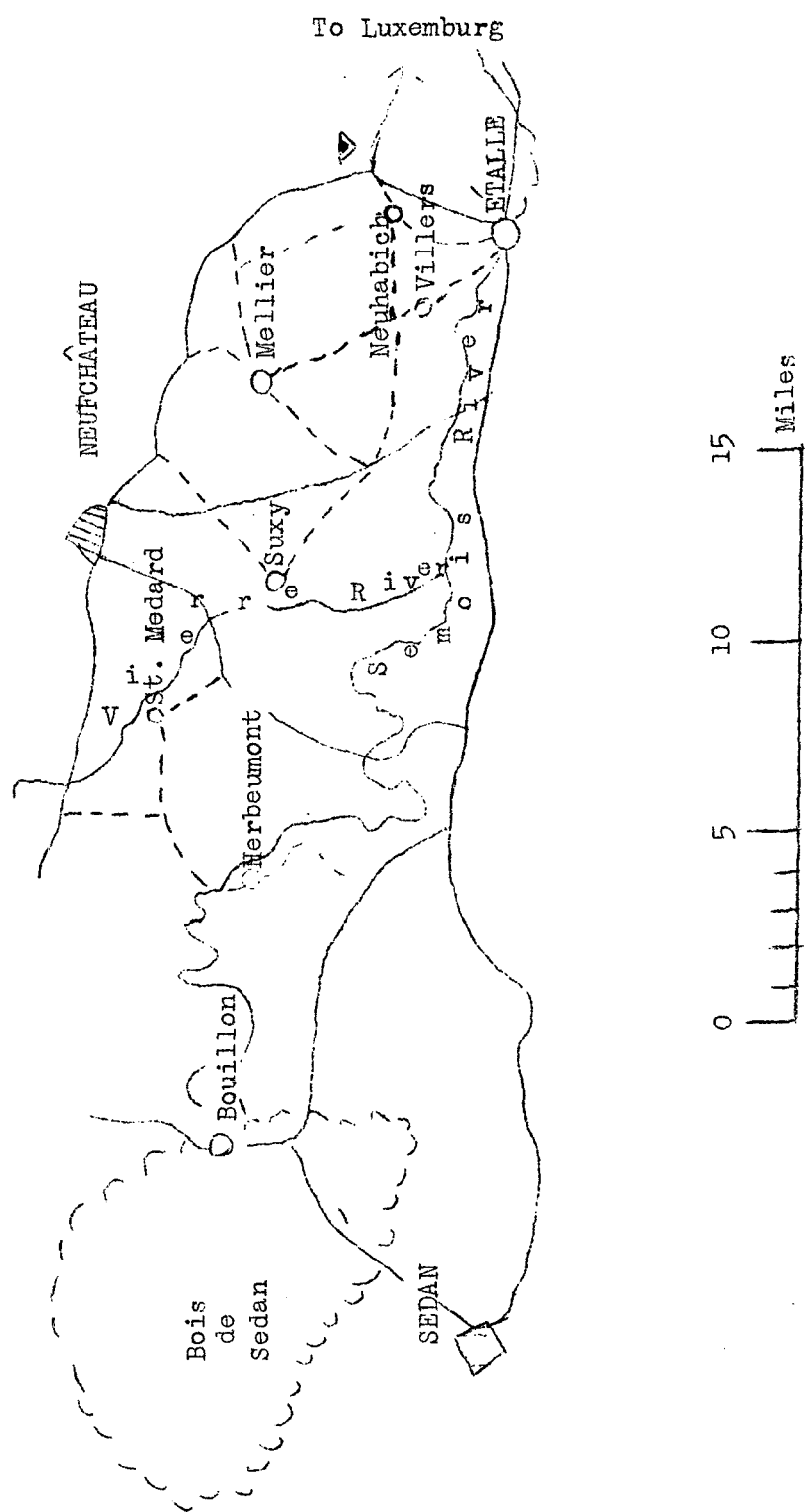


Figure 1. Area around Étalle and Neufchâteau.

GERMAN ARMORED
ASSAULT ARTILLERY

1. TRANSLATION

"A motorized platoon, with 2 antitank guns attached, constituted the leading element of our advance guard as we marched west from Vance, which is 20 miles west of Luxemburg, to Etalle (figure 1). As the vehicles approached Etalle on May 10, they encountered hostile armored scout cars, and during the ensuing engagement a report was received at regimental headquarters that Villers was occupied by French cavalry. The 2d Battalion was accordingly ordered to attack Villers immediately. For 3 hours they advanced toward the village, meeting increasing resistance, and were finally stopped at the eastern edge by strong hostile fire.

"Meanwhile the 1st Battalion, with the armored assault artillery battery attached, had arrived at Neuhabich, where the battalion commander ordered a rifle company to make contact with the 2d Battalion. Advancing slowly south from Neuhabich, the rifle company finally reached Villers, where it also met heavy resistance. The company commander, after considering the situation, sent the following oral message to the rear: 'Assault battery to the front!'

"The 3d Platoon of the armored assault artillery battery dashed forward to engage in its first fight. The platoon commander, in his command vehicle, was followed by Assault Guns No. 5 and No. 6. The platoon encountered no resistance until it arrived at the center of town, where it received heavy machine-gun fire. Two rounds from each of the assault guns silenced the machine guns.

"Assault Gun No. 6 went into action, firing at the near-by buildings. One shell exploded in a courtyard among some French cavalry horses. The animals which were uninjured galloped away, frightened by the explosion.

"Assault Gun No. 5 swung into position in the churchyard to silence hostile machine guns which were firing from two windows in a large building close by. The platoon commander ordered the gun commander to fire on this target, and two rounds from the assault gun served to silence them.

"Finally, the enemy evacuated the main street and the center of the town, but machine-gun resistance was renewed at the western edge of the village. Momentarily, it was thought that the assault guns should be sent ahead again. But the riflemen and the partially armored antitank-weapons on self-propelled mounts were able to reduce this resistance unassisted.

"The 2d Battalion remained in Villers during the night. Field kitchens were moved up, the men were fed, and medical personnel cared for the wounded. The 3d Platoon of the assault battery obtained some

rest just in rear of the front line, the men sleeping in their vehicles. The next morning, at 5 a.m., the advance guard and the 3d Platoon of the assault battery moved out toward Mellier.

"The armored assault guns soon reached a destroyed bridge across a tributary of the Semois River. The pioneers, although hard at work, had not yet completed their task here; but the guns managed to ford the river. The regimental commander, in order to get up to the front, took a seat in an assault battery munitions vehicle.

"After fording the stream, the assault guns came to a barricade of tree trunks which obstructed the road leading up a slope in one of the southern spurs of the Ardennes Forest. The driver of Assault Gun No. 5, however, stepped on his accelerator, dashed against the obstacle, and opened the way. So far, no enemy had been encountered.

"The infantry was in the lead as the advance guard moved through Mellier into a beechwood forest beyond that town. Resistance was encountered at 10:30 a.m. at a clearing in the woods. The 1st Battalion, upon emerging into the clearing, was fired upon from the direction of Suixy. The leading company deployed promptly and, supported by an antitank platoon, began to advance, finally being checked at the stream just west of the town. The regimental and battalion commanders, accompanied by certain members of their staffs, observed the action from high ground east of Suixy. Intense activity prevailed at the command posts. Heavy weapons were ordered up; tasks were assigned, and positions designated.

"As the heavy infantry weapons and armored assault guns were heard approaching from the rear, the battalion commander, in a quick decision, signalled his advancing reserve company to turn off and attack in the new direction.

"Five minutes after the heavy weapons arrived, they opened fire. In the meantime, the armored assault artillery battery continued to the front to assist the leading rifle companies. The riflemen slowly worked their way ahead, pressing hard against the enemy, driving him off of the high ground to the right front. Finally, one of the assault guns moved up on to this commanding terrain and quickly fired 11 rounds at a range of 800 yards into a battery of enemy horse artillery going into action. The assault gun itself, however, was then taken under fire by a French antitank battery.

"In the meantime, the German artillery opened fire and the battalion began to advance across the Vierre River. As usual, all the bridges had been destroyed and all the trucks had to be left behind, although the water was no obstacle for the infantry and the armored assault artillery.

"After crossing the river, the advance was checked again by resistance coming principally from a fortified house which stood along the route of advance. Assault Gun No. 5 went into action against

this house. The first round hit the lower left window; the second entered the attic window; the third went over the house but exploded among some retreating Frenchmen.

"By 5:30 p.m. all resistance in this vicinity had been overcome. The French reconnaissance battalion, which had attempted to stop the regiment, was completely destroyed.

"The advance continued, but the next 10 miles could be covered only by foot, for the trucks could not be moved across the river. The day's objective, however, was reached at 9 p.m.

"The performance of the armored assault artillery battery, in its initial engagements at Villers and Suzy, completely won the confidence of the infantrymen. In addition to giving support to the foot soldier in battle, this self-propelled artillery was also utilized in carrying light machine guns and mortars and in towing ammunition carts.

"On the next morning, May 12, the regiment moved through St. Medard and Herbeumont.

"On the following day, May 13, the regiment left Belgian soil, marching through Bouillon into the Bois de Sedan, and on the next morning it forced a crossing over the Meuse at Sedan, thereby clearing the road to the north for the oncoming panzer division."

3. COMMENTS OF OFFICIAL OBSERVER

a. The personnel of the "Greater Germany" Infantry Regiment is especially selected. Initially, the bulk of men of this organization came from the Berlin guard regiment. The regiment is motorized and belongs to an S.S. division.

b. The author indicates that in this particular engagement this assault artillery fulfilled the mission for which it was intended. Conversations with German military personnel and the context of other articles published in German military periodicals confirm the conclusion that this assault artillery gave important and timely assistance to the leading infantry elements on many occasions during the operations on the Western Front in the spring of 1940.

c. Since this weapon is completely armored, it conforms to the commonly accepted definition of a tank. According to published accounts, this weapon, during combat, moved forward from cover to cover, keeping generally abreast of the regimental reserve. When the advance of the leading foot elements was checked by resistance beyond the capabilities of the infantry weapons immediately at hand, the armored assault artillery was ordered forward along with other heavy infantry weapons and sometimes the regimental infantry reserve. When going into action, armored assault artillery vehicles sought suitable covered positions in the front line, from which they delivered direct fire upon observed targets. It is not believed that they ever preceded and cleared the way for the foot elements. Consequently, these

weapons, as employed, are not comparable to accompanying tanks.

d. It is probable that if the defending French forces had been liberally equipped with antitank mines and antitank weapons, they could have neutralized the efforts of the German armored assault artillery.

e. The action east of Suzy is in accordance with the German principle that attacking infantry seeks primarily to seize commanding terrain, not only for observation and the employment of infantry weapons, but also for the advantageous use of artillery.

f. It is noted that in the attack east of Suzy, the commander of the 1st Battalion saved time by merely signalling to the commander of his reserve company to turn off his route of advance and attack in a new direction. Details of the action contemplated for this company could be furnished later by the battalion commander or his representative.